

JPRS - NEA - 85 - 063
DREF 7 20 85 / 063
5/6/85

JPRS-NEA-85-063
6 May 1985

REGIONAL AFFAIRS

AFESD DIRECTOR INTERVIEWED ON FUND'S CURRENT ROLE

London AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT in Arabic 6 Mar 85 p 8

[Interview with Dr Muhammad al-'Imadi, director of the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development by Abd al-Mun'im al-Ashnihi: "Saudi Arabia Playing a Big Role in Supporting Fund Development Projects. Fund Gives Priority to Arab Food Security Projects;" in Riyadh, date not specified]

[Text] Dr Muhammad al-'Imadi, AFESD director general and chairman of the board, has expressed his appreciation of the step which Prince Talal bin 'Abd-al-'Aziz, director of the Arab Gulf Program, has taken in support the development and humanitarian agencies of the United Nations in backing one of the important development projects in the Gaza strip, indicating that this initiative will encourage the other Arab Funds and regional organizations in taking similar positions in the near future towards the Palestinian people in its occupied lands. Dr al-'Imadi also praised the support which the kingdom extends to the fund's programs, explaining that the kingdom contributes 20 percent of the fund's capital. He added that since its inception, the fund has met with every solicitude from al-Shaykh Muhammad Aba al-Khayl, the Saudi minister of finance and national economy, observing that he will become chairman of the fund's board of governors at the meeting which will take place 9 April 1985. Dr al-'Imadi said that the fund has extended 136 loans, valued at approximately 638 million Kuwaiti Dinars, to 16 countries. The fund also wants to contribute to rebuilding Lebanon, but this is dependent on the security situation there.

This emerged in the conversation which AL-SHARQ AL-AWSAT had with Dr Muhammad al-'Imadi during his recent visit to the Saudi capital, and the following is the text of the meeting.

[Question] What is the nature of your quick visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia?

[Answer] I have come in answer to the invitation of Prince Talal, the director of the Gulf Program. With me is my colleague, Dr Isma'il al-Zabiri, the director of the center for studies and researches at the fund, and we have surveyed AFESD activities in the service of the Arab human being, the Arab youth, child and woman, these areas being within the concern of Prince Talal. We also discussed with Prince Talal the subject of participation in support of Arab

governments to eradicate illiteracy, and the role which the fund is fulfilling together with the Arab Agency to eradicate illiteracy--part of the Arab Organization for Education, Culture and the Sciences--and the Arab Fund for Illiteracy Eradication and Adult Education in the implementation of an ambitious plan that will contribute to the eradication of illiteracy. The plan will exceed \$30 million, and it includes a project to produce educational television films for that purpose. This program consists of 45 20-minute episodes.

Prince Talal considered this effort to be in accordance with the intentions and aims of the Gulf program, and with service in a basic human problem, as it could become a basis for increasing productivity in Arab society. The Prince also promised some financial support, up to \$250,000, which might be needed for this program, and cited the importance of cooperation between the Gulf Program on one side, and AFESD in funding and nurturing the cultural and ideological participation in some programs that contribute to the development problem in Arab society, in addition to contributing to development matters through the general support given to the Arab women, child and human being in this society.

Arab Food Security

[Question] What is the role of the fund in insuring food security for the Arab countries?

[Answer] Since 1984, the fund has channeled more than half of its loan programs towards this purpose by providing the required financing for a number of agricultural projects in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Jordan, North and South Yemen, Somalia, Sudan and Djibouti, because the subject of food security is important in the economic and social development operation, particularly as the insufficiency of the food needed by man and beast, which we now observe in some continents, and specifically in the African continent, is a matter that distresses us. What we, as a development establishment, should concern ourselves with is to propel the efforts of the governments towards exploiting the extensive resources in this nation for the good of man.

Therefore the leap of 1984 is a supplement to what we began in 1983, and what is being stressed in 1985 is the financing of those important agricultural projects. The fund's concern is not limited only to the financing area, as it has made contributions to the states that it deals with, regarding the problems that are encountered by agricultural development in this nation, and the solutions which it foresees, based on its expertise in solving those problems. I would also like to mention the symposium which took place in 1984 in the UAE, where a large number of experts, on the level of former prime ministers, ministers and experts in development matters, had met. Various recommendations in the fields of developing intensive agricultural policies, the conclusions arrived at through the deliberations, were distributed to all the Arab countries.

Moreover, the fund's concerns also extend to supporting agricultural experimentation and research centers. The Arab Fund is extending financial, and also technical support to the "IKARDA" establishment, which is headquartered in Halab [Syria], and which has projects for seed development and improvement, so that it may present the Arab countries with improved seed, resulting in higher agricultural productivity. In March, 1985, the establishment will organize a seminar, to which we have invited experts from Arab agricultural research establishments from all the Arab countries so that they may learn about the results of the work which has been completed, and so that they may utilize those results. We estimate that the increase in agricultural productivity by way of seed improvement could surpass 25 percent of the present harvest, if the necessary requirements for this work are provided.

At this very stage, we also stress the importance of reclaiming the unproductive desert lands which represent an important part of Arab lands. We have prepared studies for this purpose concerning the reclamation of regions that are called "al-Hammadah," or al-Hammadah Basin, which extends between Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Syria. At the end of March 1985, a symposium with the "IKSAD" establishment will be held to study the arid, barren areas, and our attempt to conduct studies on barren desert lands and the means by which those lands may be developed will be presented. There are also the efforts we are making in the agricultural development operation, through the coordination of agricultural policies and external trade policies that concern agriculture, in the Arab countries. We are making these efforts in cooperation with the Council on Arab Economic Unity and the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development. As you see therefore, there is a concentration on the subject of food security in 1985.

A Water Policy

[Question] What about the fund's priority projects?

[Answer] The fund is concentrating on instituting a water policy that would be cognizant of the importance of water in the Arab nation, and the necessity of managing water in a manner that is in accordance with the sound exploitation, and the preservation of this important resource, not only in agricultural life, but in our life as a whole. There also are studies that are being prepared now for a symposium at the beginning of 1986, to be held in cooperation with the Kuwait Development Fund, and some other funds. The hope is that a water policy, preserving and soundly utilizing water resources and profitable to various Arab countries, could result from such work.

There are also other subjects to which the fund pays great attention. They comprise preparing the Arab human being to accept the new development tasks in the required manner. The sum of the work that we do, in cooperation with the competent Arab organizations, and in a manner that is meant to support rather than replace the local efforts that are being made in this field, is to offer various training courses, in cooperation with the Arab Union for Technical

Education and other such unions. Those training courses, be they, for example, in the area of planning, in the Arab Institute for Planning in Kuwait, or in the area of statistics, in the Arab Institute for Statistics in Baghdad, or in the area of water and water works with the Arab Union for Technical Education, or in other areas, are intended to contribute to the development of the capabilities of the Arab human being so that he will be able to be in tune with the new development tasks.

There is also the subject of putting information at the service of Arab development, which we discussed in Riyadh in 1984, and we are still working at implementing its [the symposium's] extensive and very important recommendations. Actually, in light of that successful symposium, which took place under the chairmanship of al-Shaykh Muhammad Aba al-Khayl, the Saudi minister of finance and national economy, the necessity of introducing the subject of information, the teaching of the principles of the computer, the utilization of modern communications and placing this collection of sciences at the service of primary, secondary and university education programs, had been agreed upon. Brothers from the University of Kuwait, and from other bodies in the Center for Financial Data in Saudi Arabia, in addition to a work team from the Kuwait Institute for Scientific Research and AFESD, had participated with us in this work in order to provide the necessary proposals for the preparation of the educational program which must be implemented in various schools in order to arm the pupil with this new science and make him ready to accept the characteristics of the future society, the data base society.

As we can see then, the work of the Arab Fund is not only limited to extending loans, in spite of the fact that up until now, we have extended more than 136 loans to 16 countries, amounting to approximately 638 million Kuwaiti dinars.

Loans and Assistance

[Question] Which projects received the loans?

[Answer] In addition to the subject of food security, the loans comprised other projects that involve roads, wire and wireless communications. I would like to mention here that the Fund has financed a number of those projects, including linking Morocco with Algeria, Morocco and Algeria with Tunisia and Libya, as well as linking Iraq with Syria, Jordan and then Saudi Arabia, Djibouti with Somalia, North Yemen and South Yemen, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with Qatar, the UAE, Bahrain and then Kuwait. The fund has also participated in a number of those projects as we have funded the establishment of 11 ground stations for the Arab space satellite. The efforts were concentrated on establishing the ground stations for the Arab space satellite. This is in addition to our funding some industrial projects, water and sewer projects in the Arab countries that require our services, and electrical projects. We have funded all those projects in cooperation with the rest of the Arab funds, especially the Kuwaiti Fund, the Saudi Development Fund, the Islamic Development Bank and the Abu Dhabi Fund for Economic Development. These funds cooperate with us and vice versa, and we in fact work as a cohesive and compact group. I was pleased that Prince Talal is reaffirming his concern that the work which we are doing should be coordinated and in harmony with the work of the Gulf Program here.

Rebuilding Lebanon

[Question] Let us talk now about your part in the rebuilding of Lebanon, and when may we expect the beginning of the response to its requirements?

[Answer] Lebanon is an AFESD member, and the brothers in authority in the Board of Directors of this fund wish to help and support the people and government of Lebanon in rebuilding the country. In the past, the fund had extended loans for the Beirut Port project and the electricity project in Lebanon, but the present conditions have not enabled the Arab Fund to do its duty in contributing to the efforts which must be made to rebuild Lebanon. We hope, with all eagerness and enthusiasm that, God willing, we shall be afforded this opportunity when the security situation has stabilized in Lebanon to an extent that would permit us to resume our activities in this fraternal country which is in need of every help and support from us.

[Question] What is the volume of the support required from the fund for the rebuilding of Lebanon?

[Answer] The brothers who are responsible for this at the Ministry of Finance and the Development Board in Lebanon have submitted to us programs for reconstruction. Everyone knows that the conditions which the Lebanese economy is undergoing now could require the re-examination of some of those programs so as to bring them up to date in accordance to the existing conditions in Lebanon. I think that the required efforts are very substantial, and the required financing is substantial. In the past Lebanon has participated in supporting numerous Arab activities, and it is also incumbent upon us to help our Lebanese brothers and to participate in rebuilding Lebanon when we are given an opportunity to do this.

[Question] What repercussion does the decision which Prince Talal took in relation to the Palestinian people in Gaza have on your position regarding Lebanon?

[Answer] I believe that what Prince Talal has undertaken, should be undertaken by other similar organizations. We hope that an agreement will be reached in the future between the Lebanese government and the Arab and international financing establishments on programs that will be approved by the contributing Arab countries and implemented with the aid of the Arab funds, so that there will be a concentration on an acceptable program to rebuild Lebanon. It is hoped that Lebanon will realize its aspiration in rebuilding the country and its economy. We praise God that the usurping and invading Israeli forces have began to leave Lebanon, thanks to the courageous popular resistance which has set a wonderful example, an example that will be emulated in resistance to occupation, its heroic actions having created a great impression on all Arab fighters.

Tangible Saudi Support

[Question] How does the director general of the fund regard the volume and vitality of Saudi support for AFESD.

[Answer] Saudi Arabia has a clear investment in the fund, and al-Shaykh Muhammad Aba al-Khayl had himself participated in the 1967 Algeria Conference to arrange the AFESD agreement. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia now has the deputyship to the chairman of the board of governors, and al-Shaykh Aba al-Khayl will become chairman of the board of governors at the next meeting of the board which will be held in April 1985. Through the person of its representative on the board of directors, Dr Salih al-Maydani, the kingdom is exercising clear guidance, persuasion and support for the programs and activities of the Arab Fund. The Saudi contribution to financing the fund is estimated at approximately 20 percent of the fund's capital, and it is as you see, a clear and persuasive contribution, unsurpassed except for the State of Kuwait, whose contribution is approximately 21 percent of the fund's capital. I do not regard financial contribution only as the single factor in supporting the fund, for there are other activities which the fund initiates and which receive the kingdom's constant patronage. We always meet with all the support and backing for the work we are doing from al-Shaykh Aba al-Khayl. There is also the Saudi Development Fund, as coordination exists between us and the Saudi Development Fund that has given good and encouraging results in all areas. We strive for the integration and cohesiveness of the activities of the Arab Fund with those of other Arab funds. In short I cannot but rely on the importance which the kingdom, through the government of King Fahd bin 'Abd-al-'Aziz, has accorded us, and we place all our confidence in the continuation of the support and approval of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia of the fund's activities.

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